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PREFACE

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RUMANIA is economically one of the relatively backward regions of the world. It is not as backward as vast areas of Asia and Africa, but like them it is faced with the problems of an agrarian society in the twentieth century. How are such societies to adapt themselves to the demands and challenges of the industrial world economy? This is perhaps the most interesting and compelling reason for a study of Rumanian politics and agriculture. A further reason is that since the end of the Second World War Rumania has been "behind the Iron Curtain" and has therefore acquired a certain immediate significance as part of the complex of issues dividing the Soviet Union and the United States. Finally, literature in English on Rumania is comparatively limited and unsatisfactory. Hence, this study of a country rather remote from the interests of most Americans may shed some light in a dark corner.

The premise of this book is that an understanding of Rumania's recent history requires familiarity with the depressed status of its peasantry, whose plight has been a chronic source of alarm, anxiety, or despair since the time of Tudor Vladimirescu, who in 1821 raised a popular revolt against the boyars. Discussions I heard in Bucarest in the winter of 1944–45 echoed to a surprising extent the manifestoes of 1848, the debates on the emancipation of 1864, the polemics evoked by the 1907 uprising, and the Peasant party's radical pamphlets of 1920.

[43?]

To be sure, between 1821 and 1944 Rumania underwent tremendous changes which might make one question whether the same problems were involved. An independent kingdom was created from the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which had formerly acknowledged the Turkish sultan as their suzerain; after the First World War this kingdom doubled its area. World commerce came to Rumania; industry, if not large, expanded rapidly in the twentieth century. The population multiplied many times over. In agriculture itself there were important developments. From a semipastoral land, where stock raising was more important than farming, Rumania became, for a time, one of the great wheat and maize exporters of the world.

Agrarian problems, too, seemed to change during this period. Initially the chief sources of social discontent were servile dues and labor obligations which bore heavily upon the peasant. Later the un-

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● 121 equal distribution of land, a great part of which was monopolized by huge latifundiary estates, seemed the root of the trouble. Still later the spokesmen of the peasants complained of the lack of credit and capital and claimed that industry was growing parasitically at the expense of agriculture. Finally, rural overpopulation appeared to supersede all other causes of agrarian distress.

Different efforts at reform, however, failed to overcome these evils, which seemed to be interlinked. For example, servitudes, in the guise of labor contracts, reappeared after their formal abolition because of the unequal distribution of property. The manifestations of overpopulation were only in part a consequence of demographic pressure; they also arose from the low level of output and from the estate owners' control over large areas of land. It was as though Rumania were suffering from one of those maladies which display varying symptoms at different times but continue to waste the victim. The peasantry remained poor and abased throughout, agricultural technique stayed at an exceedingly primitive level, and Rumanian society was marked by a deep chasm between capital and countryside, between peasant and ruler. In 1944 it was obvious that this changing yet persistent affliction was still present, still serious despite the extensive land reforms of 1918–21 which were to have led to a prosperous peasant agriculture by the extensive distribution of estate land to the small cultivators.

Since 1945, of course, with the progressive absorption of the country into the Soviet economic and political sphere, Rumania and its problems must be considered in the vastly more complex context of the Soviet system and in that sense cease to be an altogether intelligible field for independent investigation. While many elements of the agrarian problem remain the same—under any system demographic pressure, level of productivity, and organization of farming are objective data not to be conjured away—control of policy now lies largely in Moscow and is presumably designed for an enormous territorial and economic unit.

The aim of this book is to investigate the agrarian question and its political implications: the effect of a depressed peasantry and a retrograde agriculture upon political life, and, conversely, the attitudes and actions of the major political groups in regard to peasant poverty and agrarian reform. In general terms, the conclusion reached is that the all-pervading influence of the West in the course of the last century or more is the decisive element in this problem. Not only do the outstanding features of the agrarian crisis in Rumania stem directly or indirectly from this influence, but the domestic polit-

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ical activity is understandable only as a variety of responses, involving the copying, modification, or rejection of Western political and ideological models, to the social and economic dislocation which growing contact with the West has brought about. 121

Consequently, the eventual resolution of the agrarian problem in its broader implications depends not upon certain specific technical or political reforms but upon the much more extensive task of adjusting the total relations of Rumanian society to the Western industrial civilization which has enveloped the globe. Present Soviet domination, while reducing the possibility of Rumania's continued direct and uninhibited contact with the West, complicates and amplifies but does not alter this conclusion, for the Soviet system itself appears to be a response—on an overwhelming scale and in a particularly dynamic manner—of a society subject to the same Western influence. In this respect a study of the Rumanian agrarian question may help to clarify what seems to be the central and most fateful issue of our times.

In working out this conclusion I have attempted to combine political analysis and economic survey. Too frequently in works on Rumanian history and on the agrarian question in general I have noticed a tendency to separate politics and economics. For purposes of simple narrative or economic theorizing such a separation has its advantages. But studies dealing with the economics of the agrarian problem are apt to sidetrack the political elements and then conclude by saying, "Such-and-such would be the best economic cure for these difficulties but the unfavorable political situation has prevented its application." Similarly, a straight political narrative of the bewildering confusion of Rumanian public life is likely to conclude with the sentiment, "After all, what more could be expected under such depressed economic conditions?" In each case the picture is incomplete, the question of final responsibility evaded. Obviously, there is a continuous and reciprocal relationship between the political and the economic, and both must be constantly in mind in the search for practical solutions.

I must confess, though, that this study, too, has certain limitations with respect to scope, period covered, and precision of information. Apart from the currently decisive fact of Soviet domination, much of Rumanian history must, if my general conclusion is correct, find its explanation in the impact of external influences over which the Rumanians have had little or no control. Yet it was clearly impossible here to trace the ultimate origins and significance of such external influences as the European industrial and commercial revolution or

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●121 the manifold political and imperialist interests making up the so-called Eastern question. By limiting myself to a relatively close study of Rumania in its reaction to these influences I hope, however, to have achieved a concreteness not attainable in a more extensive survey. As William James said, "A large acquaintance with particulars often makes us wiser than the possession of abstract formulas, however deep."

With regard to the period covered, I have concentrated primarily on the years between 1922 and 1945. I have discussed only briefly the historical background and the important land reforms of 1918–21 since they have been treated in elaborate detail by Dr. David Mitrany in *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania*. While I have written at some length on events since the Communists came to power, I prefer to regard that section as a tentative postscript. My personal observations ceased in the summer of 1945, the many important subsequent developments are highly controversial and cannot be handled satisfactorily without reference to all of eastern Europe, and the information concerning them has become increasingly difficult to obtain or assess.

A third limitation, which affects the precision of my analysis, arises from the inaccuracy, unreliability, and incompleteness of Rumanian statistics, which have been a source of anguish to all who have attempted any quantitative appreciation of the Rumanian situation. Three principal reasons account for these statistical difficulties:

a) the absence of a sound basis for statistical information because of the relative immaturity of the country's economy and administration;

b) the distortion of statistics for political or propagandistic reasons;

c) the apparent inability of many Rumanians to handle the simplest arithmetical operation, a perplexing but frequently noted phenomenon. The last two difficulties, while exasperating, are in most cases amenable to a degree of criticism and correction. The first, however, is more fundamental and limits any effort to obtain a precise picture.

In 1940 the Rumanian economist and former finance minister, Virgil Madgearu, gave an accurate description of Rumanian statistical sources at that date:

> The principal difficulty of research on the Rumanian economy is the inadequacy of official statistics. . . . Thus, we have at our disposal only one census of the population of the country since it has been united in its

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ethnic frontiers—that of 1930. We have the most rudimentary knowledge of the agricultural sector, which is the most important in the Rumanian social-economic organization. We lack statistics on agricultural exploitations, and even the statistics on the extent and division of agricultural terrain, on inventory, livestock, etc., are defective. We lack statistics on agricultural laborers. Although there is more information on the industrial sector, statistical data are limited to manufacturing industries. Data on extractive industries are incomplete, and are non-existent for crafts and domestic industries.[1]

As Madgearu observed, agricultural statistics are particularly weak. For several years after the First World War estimates of the distribution of agricultural property were based on information gathered in 1905 or before. Plans were laid for a thorough agricultural census in 1930, but only a brief summary for the whole of Rumania was published. In 1941 the government organized a much more scientific agricultural census, but unfortunately only a provisional summary of the results was published, plus detailed studies of a few districts. Another drawback was that the frontiers of Rumania in 1941 did not correspond with those before 1940 or with those after 1945, and as the director of the Rumanian Central Institute of Statistics said, "Our results cannot be compared with preceding situations." The relatively few statistics which have been published by the Groza regime since 1945 are highly tendentious and suspect.

In short, any attempt at rigorous quantitative precision in discussing Rumanian agriculture seems hopeless. Although in the pages that follow a good deal of numerical data has been included, I have used it cautiously and with a painful awareness of its weaknesses and dangers.

Undoubtedly, my general attitude toward Rumania has been fundamentally determined by my own experiences while in that country during the first year after the armistice of September, 1944. To balance these subjective impressions, which have led to bias and unwarranted generalizing in so much of the writing about eastern Europe and the Balkans, I have checked my conclusions with as many primary sources as possible. These are discussed in a bibliographical note at the end of this study. Needless to say, the events of the past five years have compelled modification and in some cases rejection of my earlier opinions. But then, the writer of contemporary history can scarcely hope to build his house upon a rock.

1. Virgil Madgearu, *Evoluția economiei românești după războiul mondial.* (Bucarest, 1940), p. v.

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III

AGRICULTURAL POPULATION AND PRODUCTION

121 THE course of Rumanian politics between the wars can be understood only in its economic setting; urgent economic problems constantly demanded the attention of all governments, and at the same time the prevailing poverty and economic backwardness undermined political life and contributed powerfully to the emergence of the dictatorships. This and the following chapter sketch the general features of the economic framework, with particular emphasis upon agriculture and the demographic problem. Industry, commerce, and finance are considered primarily in their relation to the agrarian question.

Population [1]

161 According to the 1930 census, Rumania had a population of
162 18,057,028 persons, the largest of any state in eastern Europe with the exception of Poland. While the density, 61 persons per square kilometer in 1930, was less than that of the more highly industrialized states of western Europe, the population was increasing at a rapid rate. Rumania had one of the highest birth rates in non-Russian Europe as well as the highest death rate. In general, its population pattern resembled that of the other states of eastern Europe, especially Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Ukraine, and was in marked contrast to the stable or declining populations of the West.

163 Eastern Europe is now passing through the phase of great popu-
165 lation growth which began in England and western Europe in the eighteenth century and has since radiated eastward. This phenomenon, one of the most important in European history, appears to have followed a definite sequence: first, a high death rate and a high birth rate, more or less in balance, giving a stable or only slightly expanding population; then the death rate dropped rapidly; finally the birth rate dropped down to or below the death rate. The lag between the fall in the death rate and the subsequent fall in the birth rate produced the great expansion of population. From current evidence

1. More complete statistical information on the population is given in the Appendix.

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FOREWORD

By LORD MESTON

President of the Le Play Society

121 LET US ASK OURSELVES—students, busy workers, travellers,
114 ordinary newspaper-reading stay-at-homes, whoever we are —what do we know about Roumania? Extraordinarily little, would be the honest answer of most of us. We know that Roumania was our ally in the Great War, and picked up some territory thereby. We believe that her language is nearer to Latin than any other European vernacular. We remember that her map is dotted with romantically-named provinces—Bessarabia, Moldavia, Transylvania and others. But there we halt. Encyclopaedias would tell us more, but encyclopaedias are dull things. Here is a little book without a dull page, which nevertheless tells us a very great deal.

It is the work of members of the Le Play Society, who employed a holiday tour in seeing Roumania for themselves. Trained observers most of them, they brought back a collection of fresh, first-hand studies of the country and its life. They show us the land as it now is, built up from its geological past. They tell us of the peoples who have dwelt in it since pre-historic times; of the tribes which have poured backwards and forwards across it; of the folk who inhabit it now, of their usages, their faiths and their social life. We learn about the agriculture of the land, its industries, its mineral resources, and its economic limits. Its trees and flowers and cottage gardens are described; its climate, and the gala dress of its peasantry. There are no politics, but one gets a glimpse of how political change has reacted on rural life and prosperity.

Running through all the various studies, and linking them together, is a thread which each of the workers recognises as of the essence of the pattern. That thread is the special interest of the geographer in all that he sees, his capacity

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for tracking the constant inter-relation between Man and Nature. Without claiming, as has been claimed, that Geography is the oldest of the sciences, he follows its guidance in the sure confidence that it will explain the life and activities of a country as no other single science can do. Hence his affection for "regional studies," such as this of Roumania. Hence his ready appreciation of much in a country's anthropology, sociology, economics, which would otherwise be isolated and undigested knowledge.

This is the *raison d'être* of the Le Play Society. It has now produced a series of these small handbooks, all based on original expert observation on the spot, clothing the dry bones of the old geographies with the flesh and blood of life and its story. As contributions to our knowledge of the world, and as companions to the more formal text-books, they ought to be of special value to teachers and students; and they may safely be used as models for other regional work, whether on a similar or on a less ambitious scale. Those who find the handbooks helpful may wish to make the closer acquaintance of the Society and its methods.

There is another aspect of the Society's work which appeals strongly to me personally. Having watched for years the *va et vient* at Geneva, where men and women of different nations are constantly mixing in work and in pleasure, I cannot overstate the value of kindly human intercourse as a solvent of international problems. Barriers have to be broken down before mankind get to know and understand their fellows: and there is nothing for levelling barriers like crossing frontiers. Friendly excursions such as those of the Le Play groups, intent only on studying and understanding the ways of other peoples and their problems, can do great good. To show interest in other people's lives is surely to generate mutual sympathy; and mutual sympathy is the only sure foundation for world peace. All success therefore to the Le Play Society and its members.

MELTON

the majority limits its enquiries to the policies of their rulers and the significance of their resources in terms of power politics. In the long run it is the mode of life and outlook of their peoples which will count for most and herein lies the value of the Le Play "Studies" as portraying the present phase of adjustment to environment.

THE appearance of this survey is particularly opportune. Roumania is rapidly acquiring a new significance in the chequer-board of Europe, and with its complex geographical relationships, its mixed inheritance, its strikingly contrasted but interdependent natural regions and its predominantly peasant population, needs precisely this method of investigation for its interpretation to western students. The present volume supplements an earlier study of life in the Eastern Carpathians by an analysis of a typical Wallachian district and of the important transhumant movement which has long linked the economy of Mountain and Plain.—This detailed survey is preceded by an admirable exposition of the wider European setting of Roumanian life.

P. M. ROXBY

19th December, 1938.

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THE ARGEŞ DISTRICT

101 133 THE EXTENDED ROUMANIA that was organised after 1918 includes the old areas of Wallachia, Dobrogea, Moldavia, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania and Timişoara, of varied allegiance before the World War, but all containing from early historic times onwards a proportion of Roumanian-speaking people. Transylvania is the mountain bastion with the eastern Carpathians as its eastern boundary, the southern Carpathians or Transylvanian Alps as its southern edge, and the western Roumanian Carpathians or Bihor, etc., mountains on its western flank. Its mountainous frame and its hilly interior give it a very decidedly upland character, even if the Olt, the Maroş and the Szamoş, which drain it, have considerable systems of tributary valleys. Outside the bastion to the east Bukovina and Moldavia slope down to the great plain of eastern Europe, of which Bessarabia forms the flank west of the Dniestr. Behind the bastion to the west Timişoara stretches down to the Tisza, and forms the south-eastern flank of the middle Danubian plain. Outside the bastion on the south is Wallachia, sloping down towards the lower Danube, while beyond the considerable barrier formed by the lowest portion of the Danube and to the south-east, is the low plateau area of the Dobrogea.

[113] IN A PREVIOUS study we gave in some measure a picture of rural life in the eastern Carpathians near the border between Transylvania and Moldavia, where the mountains barely reach 1,900 m. (say 6,200 feet), and the highest land is often in great expanses of pasture with deep valleys cut by the rival drainage systems of the two sides, which are separated by a number of passes that may indent the watershed. In the eastern Carpathians Roumanians and Szeklers, respectively Uniate and Roman Catholic, live in adjacent villages, and the former, especially, send flocks and herds to the highland pastures.

121 THIS STUDY is intended to deal more especially with what is thought to be a typical area of rural Wallachia, having an almost entirely Roumanian population attached to the Orthodox Church and living under circumstances differing

121 considerably from those of the eastern Carpathians; this area is the district focusing upon Curtea de Argeş.

101 133 WALLACHIA has already been described as the land stretching from the southern Carpathians or Transylvanian Alps to the Danube. The mountains themselves are largely of metamorphosed rock with flanking Miocene deposits; they are about 40 km. wide with the sharp main ridge (rising at Negoiu to 2,544 m. or 8,331 feet) parallel to the long flanks about 11 km. from the northern and 29 km. from the southern edge. Several rivers have worked their valleys out among the mountains in a direction parallel to the ridge and the edges.

133 THERE ARE huge accumulations of pebbly, often deltaic, outwash beyond the south flank of the mountains, the layers sloping southward and giving sunward dip-slopes separated by small northward-facing scarps, the woods of which contrast with the arable lands on the dip-slopes. This pebbly outwash is deeply dissected by southward-flowing consequent streams, some of which rise in it, while others, like the Argeş, penetrate the mountain wall, making a wild narrow gorge. In the deep valleys of the pebbly material houses shelter from the north winds. The Olt has cut right through the mountains and captured a subsequent river of the northern flank, and its way through the mountains is by a deep valley, which is wider in some sections that are more or less "subsequent" and narrower in others that are rather "consequent." At about 20-25 km. southward from the mountain wall the residual hills of loose material that stand out between the consequent valleys milden down; the amount of alluvium and the breadth of the river valleys increase and it becomes possible to bridge the rivers, so it is at about this distance from the mountains that have grown the towns of Ramnicu Valcea on the Olt and Curtea de Argeş on the Argeş. Ramnicu Valcea is at the last narrowing of the Olt before it begins to braid on a broad alluvial plain, and its site is not easily defensible. The Argeş has terraces near the stream on the eastern side at the bridge, and the river has already swung against this bank some 2 km. north of the bridge. This gives defensible positions as well as facilities for bridging, and helps to account for the historic, if somewhat localised, importance of the town of Curtea de Argeş, the focus of the region of which studies were made.

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H. J. F.
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census taker but by the free statement of each inhabitant; it is confirmed by the consonance of the findings whether taking race, language or religion as criteria, as well as by comparison with the official population statistics of Austria-Hungary and Russia.

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Inasmuch as the Award of Vienna was necessarily an expedient, I have thought it useful to give here a comprehensive abstract of Romania's racial figures together with historical outlines of her border regions, in the conviction that no lasting solution of European unrest could afford to disregard or minimize the racial realities of the continent's perennial danger zones.

C. U. C.

North Hatley, P. Q.
October 20, 1941.